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Agreement reached on Mackinac Bridge legislation, passage expected in coming days

LANSING – Members of the Senate, House of Representatives and the Granholm administration have reached an agreement on legislation that will ensure the future of the Mackinac Bridge and the authority that governs it. The agreement is being reviewed by all parties to ensure there are no technical conflicts.

The package is sponsored by state Sen. Jason Allen and Reps. Tom Casperson and Kevin Elsenheimer.

“We must do what is in the best interest of the Mackinac Bridge, which means we must all work together to ensure that the bridge is protected for generations to come,” said Allen, R- Traverse City. “I am pleased that the governor was willing to work in a bi-partisan manner with me and my Republican colleagues in the Legislature to solidify in state law the roles and responsibilities of the Mackinac Bridge Authority.”

The legislation mirrors an agreement which was signed by the governor, Michigan Department of Transportation Director Gloria Jeff and Mackinac Bridge Authority Chair William H. Gnodtke. Under the agreement, the MDOT director will defer to the judgment of the Mackinac Bridge Authority on all matters related to the traditional powers, duties, and functions of the MBA.

“This legislative package reflects the agreement reached by the Bridge Authority and MDOT,” said Casperson, R-Escanaba. “The governor’s support of these bills will ensure that this agreement is never compromised again.”

The bills would:

- Repeal the section of law that stipulates that the MBA will revert to Michigan Department of Transportation control once the bridge debt is paid, allowing the authority to retain control of decision making in perpetuity;
- Clearly outline the specific functions which the MBA is responsible for outside of MDOT’s jurisdiction; and
- Clarify how the finances of the bridge will be handled, insuring that bridge revenue and earnings will be only used for Mackinac Bridge and not diverted for other purposes.

(More)

Although the agreement between the authority and the administration fully restores power to the authority, the agreement needs to become statute to prevent possible future takeover attempts.

“I’m pleased the governor has recognized the importance this legislation has to ensure the sovereignty of the Mackinac Bridge Authority,” said Elsenheimer, R-Bellaire. “I appreciate her support and look forward to her signing these bills.”

At a town hall meeting hosted by Allen, Casperson and Elsenheimer earlier this fall, Jeff’s decision to take away the decades-long responsibilities of the authority based on her interpretation of attorney general opinions from the 1960s was subject to harsh criticism from northern Michigan residents. This shift of power and subsequent outcry led to the recent agreement.

Senate Bills 829-830, sponsored by Allen, and House Bills 5333-5339, sponsored by Casperson and Elsenheimer, are expected to pass their respective chambers in the coming days.

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